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DE RUEHBM #0436/01 0731736  
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P 141736Z MAR 06  
FM AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3937  
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE  
RUEHUP/AMEMBASSY BUDAPEST 1042  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BUCHAREST 000436

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/14/2016

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [SOCI](#) [ECON](#) [ENRG](#) [EINV](#) [MARR](#) [HU](#) [RO](#)  
SUBJECT: BASESCU PREDICTS CALM ETHNIC HUNGARIAN "AUTONOMY  
DECLARATION," TOUTS NEW ENERGY INITIATIVES

REF: A. BUCHAREST 410

[1](#)B. BUCHAREST 278

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Mark Taplin  
for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. President Traian Basescu predicted to the Ambassador during a March 13 meeting that a planned March 15 "autonomy declaration" organized by a fringe ethnic Hungarian group would be a relatively low-key event. He characterized it as the product of a power struggle between the mainstream ethnic Hungarian party (UDMR) and radical fringe activists, adding that he had taken steps to prevent the occurrence of a "counter demonstration" by Romanian nationalists aligned with Greater Romania Party (PRM) leader Corneliu Vadim Tudor. He also made it clear he suspected nationalists in Hungary of stirring the ethnic pot in Romania, citing Victor Orban and Fidesz specifically. In response to the Ambassador's expression of interest in Basescu's views on energy security, the Romanian president asserted that while Romania was less dependent on external sources of energy than many other European countries, he was exploring various options for energy diversification. Basescu claimed Romania would take a position within the next month regarding its planned acquisition of F-16 aircraft, saying the GOR hoped to acquire F-16s from either the Netherlands or the U.S. At the same time, he ruled out acquisition from Israel. End Summary.

"Intelligent" Response to Ethnic-Hungarian Gathering

[1](#)2. (C) During a March 13 meeting in Basescu's office, the Ambassador expressed his concern over the prospect of violence at an ethnic Hungarian gathering in the Transylvanian town of Odorheiul Secuiesc March 15, where a tiny, fringe ethnic Hungarian group's declaration will reportedly make a declaration of "autonomy" (Ref A). The Ambassador reaffirmed the U.S. strongly supported Romania's EU accession in January 2007 but added that any "untoward incident" on March 15 could have a negative impact on May 15 (the date of Romania's crucial EU spring accession report.) Basescu immediately assured the situation would remain under control. "We are intelligent," he stressed, continuing that "we will let the Magyars talk...and we will block the Romanians from going to Odorheiul Secuiesc." Basescu said he had recently spoken with extreme nationalist and Greater Romania Party (PRM) leader Corneliu Vadim Tudor and warned him not to go to Odorheiul Secuiesc or to send followers there. The Romanian president reported that security forces would block the roads and turn back any attempt by ethnic Romanians to travel to Odorheiul Secuiesc for the March 15 event. (Note: March 14 press reports quoted Tudor as

stating that following discussions with Basescu, Interior Minister Vasile Blaga and Romanian Intelligence Chief Radu Timofte he had canceled plans to hold a counter-demonstration in Odorheiul Secuiesc. End Note.)

13. (C) Basescu affirmed that for the majority of ethnic Hungarians March 15 was "a celebration...a holiday for them."

The GOR would only react to the Odorheiul Secuiesc declaration if "Romanian territorial integrity" were called into question. The issue, he explained, was "whether the declaration will be followed by actions that are unconstitutional." In response to the Ambassador's question, Basescu promised he would "follow constitutional means." He acknowledged that he has been in contact with the organizers of the March 15 declaration, including the Mayor of Odorheiul Secuiesc, to see if they would "modify their statements." In response to the Ambassador's question as to whether he planned to travel to Odorheiul Secuiesc, Basescu admitted he was "thinking about it," but would only go if he was assured any declaration would not be "against the Constitution."

14. (C) The Ambassador told Basescu that he had recently met with mainstream ethnic Hungarian party (UDMR) leader Bela Marko, who had claimed that the impasse over the proposed minorities law, a subject near and dear to the heart of UDMR members, had contributed to the splinter group's planned autonomy declaration. (Ref A) Basescu retorted that "the minority law is not the issue, the issue is the internal dispute within the Hungarian community." He pointed to a power struggle between the mainstream UDMR's leaders and radical ethnic Hungarians as the root of the problem. Basescu also blamed outsider agitators, singling out Viktor Orban, "one of Europe's last extremists," and Hungary's Fidesz party, and expressing the hope that "Orban won't push for undemocratic processes." Basescu asserted that the

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"standard for minorities in Romania is very high compared to other European countries." He ticked off a list of benefits enjoyed by ethnic Hungarians, such as schools, a university and theaters employing the Hungarian language. Basescu concluded by reiterating his earlier promise to handle the March 15 events "with intelligence," assuring the Ambassador that the day's events would not negatively affect Romania's EU accession prospects.

#### Diverse Energy Options

15. (C) The Ambassador stated that the U.S. supports a competitive and diverse energy sector in the region. Basescu remarked that Romania is relatively less dependent on imported energy sources than other states in the region, observing, however, that its dependence on imported gas, in particular, became more acute in winter months. Last year, at the EU Hampton Court gathering, he had advocated that other European countries consider "relaunching their nuclear plants," an idea which only Berlusconi had seconded. Germany, he observed, along with the Scandinavians, were sitting on the fence. The Ambassador agreed that Romania had some domestic energy sources but pointed out that it would require more energy in the future to fuel a growing economy. Basescu asserted "we are putting huge amounts of dollars into supporting undemocratic states" which produce oil, implying that these resources could be better spent elsewhere. He stated that Romania supported the Nabucco natural gas pipeline, explaining, "we don't want energy from one source."

16. (C) Basescu also bruited the possibility of building a compressed natural gas terminal at the Black Sea port of Constanta for Qatari gas, noting that Qatar currently supplies natural gas to Japan, India and Spain. According to Basescu, "Romania is prepared to receive Qatar's natural gas...and we can build pipelines to Poland and Ukraine." Romania is preparing to "do a study to determine what part of Europe can be supplied (with natural gas) from Constanta," adding that unspecified "other European countries" could

pitch in. Basescu added that he would like American compressed natural gas handling equipment, which he had seen during his February visit to Qatar, and which he labeled as "the best." Basescu, a former sea captain, asserted that 300-meter ships carrying gas from Qatar would have "no problem" passing through the Bosphorous, since the Turks in recent years had taken the necessary safety measures for this type of ship traffic.

#### Come Fly With Me: Romania Evaluates F-16 Acquisition

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17. (C) Basescu reported that Romania planned to take a position "in the next month" regarding its planned acquisition of F-16 aircraft. He stated that Romania's decision would be based upon the underlying premise of "how we can adapt our armed forces to NATO standards." Basescu said it was "clear" that Israeli-provided fighters "are not a solution" and Romania has "drawn a line through" the possibility of acquiring F-16s from Israel. Basescu continued that Romania would choose between "new F-16s (from the U.S.) or Dutch F-16s." He noted that the "Dutch price is good" but expressed uncertainty about the maintenance contracts for the Dutch-provided F-16s. Basescu described Romania's ultimate goal as the acquisition of Joint Strike Fighters (JSF) and speculated about whether new or used F-16s would provide the "best access to the new JSF." He stated that he would appreciate guidance on whether it was better to obtain new or used F-16s, but stressed he was conscious of the advantages of acquiring new planes. The Ambassador observed that proper aircraft maintenance would be vital, and took note of the fact that Romania had experienced some difficulties in meeting the less complex requirements for keeping up its modest fleet of C-130s.

18. (C) Comment. Although Basescu was deliberately evasive about whether he would attend the March 15 event in Odorheiul Secuiesc, he appeared confident the gathering would unfold peacefully, twice assuring the Ambassador of an "intelligent" response by the GOR. Basescu's polite but forceful insistence that the March 15 declaration was in no way linked to the Romanian parliament's failure to pass a minorities law sought by the ethnic Hungarian community suggested that this episode is as much about domestic politics as it is about national security. The fact that Basescu acknowledged he has been in direct contact with Hungarian minority politicians who are behind the Odorheiul Secuiesc event -- and vying for

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political leverage with their UDMR rivals -- suggests that the Romanian president is, as usual, playing all the angles. End Comment.

19. (U) Amembassy Bucharest's reporting telegrams are available on the Bucharest SIPRNet website: [www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/bucharest](http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/bucharest)  
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